

My historic house is threatened for sake of a few feet

I have just seen the circular being distributed in this area concerning the public inquiry on Wednesday, 7 May, at Chatham Town Hall at 10 a.m. into Kent County Council's plans to demolish my listed home.

Many people know by now that our purchase of this house nearly 30 years ago carried the probability of our losing three feet (up to the porch) of the front garden.

This would not only enable the stretch of Luton Road outside the house to be made as wide as the rest of its length, but would also straighten it.

The current proposal requires demolishing the

entire house for the sake of less than four feet.

I have been shocked to discover many people believe the entire site of my house is needed for the Luton Arches road improvement scheme.

But I am comforted when I see how appalled they are when I tell them the house would be destroyed to gain approximately two-and-half feet of garden needed for new side steps to the porch and 15 inches off one corner of one room.

This would not be necessary at all if the new island at the junction of Luton Road and Chatham Hill were made narrower and shorter.

Many men with sincere questioning eyes have asked me "Do you know why they



The house that is threatened

want the house down? Have they told you yet?" — and without exception they have been drivers.

It is true my garage would intrude on to the pavement and beyond the frontage of other properties in Luton Road — but by only two-thirds of a brick and I have offered to lose a foot from it.

The circular says views and opinions can be sent to the Department of the Environment south east region, 375 Kensington High Street, London.

MARGARET SCOTT THOMPSON, Thorney Lodge, Luton Road, Chatham.

Young burglar gets jail threat

A Chatham man who admitted burglary was told by a judge that if he got in trouble again he could find himself in custody for a long time.

John Wright (21), of Bromley Close, was given a two-month prison sentence, suspended for two years, at Maidstone Crown Court.

Judge Waley said he had a number of previous convictions but there were things in his favour.

Wright admitted burglary at a house in Port Close, Chatham, last September and stealing a video recorder and cassette tape. At an earlier hearing he had also admitted taking part in an affray and stealing a box of chocolates in Chatham in March. Wright was awaiting trial at the Crown Court for these matters when he broke into the house in Port Close.

Mr. Donald Cryan, defending, said the offences in March followed an afternoon's drinking. He was the worse for drink and he tried to get the knife away from another man during the affray.

The burglary was committed on the spur of the moment. He made a full and frank confession to police and all the property was recovered.

Judge Waley said he did not think Wright was the person who took the chocolates although he was there

City fights county scheme to pull down house for road widening

STORY OF THE THAT WIDES COUNCILS

THE fate of a listed Georgian home in the path of major road improvements at Luton Arches, Chatham, has divided city and county councillors.

The county council wants to demolish the four-bedroomed house, built around 1840, to widen Luton Road. But members of the city council's Development Services Committee have decided they want to keep it.

They ratified a recommendation, made when they visited the site, that the house should stay. The Department of the Environment will make the final decision because the house is listed.

City Cllr, Dickie Andrews told members it was "sheer lunacy" to retain the house, which had no great historical value. He said it was about time Luton was



Cllr. Dickie Andrews: "Lunacy"

improved and this would be a good place to start.

Cllr. Tom Mason said that the county council would not have asked for a whole house to be pulled down unless there were sound technical reasons. But the majority of members argued the house should not make way for a small re-alignment of Luton Road.

Cllr. Adrian Crowther said the road had been two-way for a few weeks and there did not seem to be any problems. He could not see how the loss of the house could be justified.

Cllr. God Chalker said the house was being "sacrificed" by the county council. Room for the road could easily have been found on the other side, he said.

Cllr. Reg Cox said its demolition was unnecessary. The only problem to worry about at the Luton Arches junction was illegal parking, not the width of the road.

Cllr. David Smith said the county council had gone in for "overkill". They wanted to demolish a whole house to move the road a few inches.

Miss Margaret Thompson said her son has lived in the house for 10 years and she said her home should be retained for the sake of Chatham, which has seen



The house pictured during more pleasant weather

the demise of so many interesting buildings. She said county council planners 18 months ago showed her plans which would have saved the house, called Thornley Lodge. This involved taking part of the front garden.

But the county council said this option would reduce the life-span of the new junction from 10 to four years, make it more dangerous and be costlier.

The eight-roomed house, which features original sash windows and staircase, is regarded as important by The

Georgian Society.

It said it is a handsome building of greater quality than most others in Chatham of the same period, excluding the dockyard.

The society said a central reservation could be narrowed and re-aligned to retain the house.

Water bill rise is kept down

Water charges are to rise by around 8 1/2p in the £, bringing the average bill to a fraction under £100 a year.

But the increases announced by Southern Water Chief Mr. William Courtney are much lower than was predicted a couple of months ago.

He said: "The Government has eased the pressure on us and this means that the increase we need is smaller."

"There is one other important factor which makes this smaller increase possible and that is the continuing reduction in operating expenditure of Southern Water," said Mr. Courtney, who took over as Southern Water chairman six months ago.

"Our operating costs have gone down and down and we are certainly playing our part in the national need for greater efficiency and economy in all aspects of business and commercial life," he added.

The 8.6 per cent increase will add £7.80 to the charges for an average customer with a rateable value of £200, taking the bill of £99.50 or 27p a day — about 12p for water and 15p for sewage treatment and disposal.

Mr. Courtney said the authority would this year spend about £180 million on keeping the region's water services running.

Children 'supported off-licence petition'

CHIP SHOP OWNER'S PLEA IS REJECTED

A petition supporting a proposed off-licence by a Rochester fish-and-chip shop owner was signed by people who were too young to drink, Medway Licensing Court was told.

Mr. Shener Hassan wanted to run the business next door to the chip shop in Orion Road and 400 signed his petition.

However, Mr. Victor Booth, who runs an off-licence and general store next to the planned business, told the magistrate that some who had signed the petition were aged just 13 and 14.

Magistrates refused the application after hearing

about disturbances outside the chip shop and of police fears that youngsters from Warren Wood Youth Club might try to buy drink from there.

They were told Mr. Hassan planned to open the off-licence until 10.30 every night except Sunday. Mr. Paul Garland, for the police, said they had no objections to the application, but they pointed out that there had been complaints about noise at the fish bar.

He said if the licence were granted it would give youngsters at the nearby Warren Wood Youth Club the opportunity to try to buy drink.

Mr. Hassan, who lives in

Brentwood, Essex, told the committee that 400 people had signed a petition, which was left in his fish shop supporting his plan to open the off-licence.

Mr. Booth told the committee he had run a small off-licence in his general store and newsgents since August, 1984.

He did not think it was a viable proposition to open a specialist off-licence because there were already two nearby.

Suspect

The first three pages of the petition supporting the application had been signed by 10 youngsters whom he knew were under 18.

He said he knew many of them personally and his 15-year-old son went to school with some of them. Mrs. Lorraine Milton, who owns an off-licence in Beatty Road, objected to the application because she said the area was adequately served with off-licences.

Mr. Michael Dakers, for Mr. Booth, also maintained there was no need for another off-licence in the area and the petition was extremely suspect.

Franks threw a nearby rubbish bin through the window of the building. The police were called and he was arrested.

Mr. Simon Franklin, defending, said Franks had been drinking with his friends in the pub and had about four or five pints.

They left at about 11 p.m. and were approached by another group of youths outside the pub.

There was a skirmish between the two groups and my client had a beer glass thrown at him. In self-defence he picked up the bin and threw it at the youth who had thrown the glass," said Mr. Franklin.

Franks, a boat builder, was fined £75 and ordered to pay £175 compensation and £30 costs.

Garage's plan brings road fear

Plans to convert a garage workshop in Rainham into a car showroom are worrying Gillingham councillors.

The garage is at the junction of London Road and Maidstone Road and councillors fear a showroom could create problems because of the site's access to the busy A2.

So far the business's boss has refused to re-locate the access around the corner in Maidstone Road. Coun-

cillors are also worried that the new showroom could cause parking problems, despite a promise to provide spaces.

The Planning Committee agreed on Thursday to hold a site meeting before deciding whether to allow the conversion.

DRIVER TRIED TO GET RID OF CANNABIS

A Waincott man who admitted possessing cannabis was fined £50 by Medway magistrates.

Mr. Nigel Weston, prosecuting, said police followed David Boomsa, who was driving in Gillingham on 11 December.

When the car stopped in Medway Street they saw Boomsa throw a packet from the window.

Boomsa admitted it had been cannabis and said it had been only the second time he had used the drug.

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Old house in way of Luton development can stay

VICTORY IN CAMPAIGN TO SAVE SPINSTER'S GEORGIAN LODGE

A GEORGIAN house in the path of the Luton Arches road improvement scheme in Chatham has been saved from the bulldozer.

A Department of Environment Inspector has ruled that the villa Thorney Lodge in Luton Road, built in the 1830s, is too important to be demolished.

The refusal of permission to pull down the listed building represents a victory for conservation organizations groups including the Georgian Group.

Miss Margaret Scott Thompson's attempt to save her home of 30 years was also backed by the city council.

Miss Scott Thompson told a public inquiry in May it was wrong she should lose her home for the sake of a few feet of road.

She and her supporters told the inquiry a boundary wall could be moved to improve visibility, but the inspector says in his report published this week that this would result in only a minor improvement and such major disruption to the setting of the house, which appears to have been unchanged since 1837, is not justified.

The county council said demolition was essential to its scheme designed to improve a notorious bottleneck and accident blackspot.

But the inspector said that while he accepted retaining the house might mean congestion in Luton Road at peak times in some five years' time, it would be clear for most of the day.

The inspector noted that all parties agreed Thorney Lodge was an unusual

house worthy of keeping because of its individual merit and good structural condition.

He concluded he was satisfied the Luton Arches junction could be considerably improved without demolishing the house.

He shared concern about access from a garage, but said: "The quality and individual merit of Thorney Lodge are sufficient to demand compromise in the design of the highway improvements to enable it to be retained."

A county council spokesman said this week it was too soon to say whether completion of the road scheme would be delayed in view of the decision.

Appreciated

The council now has to decide whether to leave the junction layout as it is or to seek ways of improving visibility and widening Luton Road which would have been achieved by knocking down the house.

Ironically, this could mean the scheme which threatened to flatten the house, could lead to its being appreciated more than before.

The city council told the inquiry that the setting of Thorney Lodge could be enhanced by the demolition of houses on either side, both of which were due to come down anyway, which might also help the question of access.

And the inspector agreed the suggestion would make the house more prominent.